

THE *N^o 20*
O B L I G A T I O N
To BELIEVE the
D I V I N E M I S S I O N
O F
J E S U S C H R I S T;

Set forth
In T W O S E R M O N S,
Lately Preach'd
In the CHURCH of RICHMOND, in the
County of SURREY.

By *J O H N B R O W N E*, M. A.
Rector of *Beeby* in *Leicestershire*, and Chaplain to His
Royal Highness The PRINCE OF WALES.

L O N D O N: *[Signature]*

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E R R A T A.

PAGE 2. Line 17. for *not*, read *no*. Page 7. Line 16.
for Comma put a Period, and *dele* the Comma after
Publsh. Page 9. Line 16. read, are so far free. Page 30.
Line 18. *dele*, of. Page 32. Line 3. read, a *Case*. Page
38. Line 13. for *Views*, read *Vices*.





To His Royal Highness

F R E D E R I C K,

P R I N C E of W A L E S.



S the Power of Kings and Rulers is deriv'd from God, so it has no nearer or higher Concern, than to promote the Honour of God; to spread a just Sense of His Majesty and Authority whom they represent, and a due Regard to his Will, by whom they

they reign. This Exercise of their Power is the great Privilege of their Station, as well as the Duty; since it enables them to be publick Benefactors, publick Blessings; to diffuse Warmth and Comfort among their People, *like the Light of the Morning when the Sun riseth*; and to provide in the best Manner for their Eternal as well as Temporal Happiness.

As this, Sir, is a noble Argument for the promoting of Religion; an Argument well adapted to the great and generous Minds of Princes; so it may be apply'd with much Advantage to the Christian Religion, which is most highly useful to Mankind, both in their social and private Capacity. It teaches so just, and rational a Sense of God; so true and generous a Regard of Man, and binds both on the Conscience by such awful Sanctions, that it is admirably fitted to make Men serviceable to one another, and happy in themselves. No greater Felicity can possibly be desir'd, than what would flow from a general Observance

fervance of its Precepts. Were this the Case, Harmony, and Order, and Virtue would prevail; a mutual Circulation of good Offices would abound, and the poetical Fiction of the Golden Age would be a just Image of our own.

AND yet many Books have been publish'd, in direct Affront to our Laws and Constitution, with professed Design to root out the Belief, and to subvert the Establishment of this excellent Religion; to persuade Men to condemn it as an Imposture, and to follow the Guidance of their Reason only, or to *do what is right in their own Eyes*, without Fear of a future Account, or State of Retribution hereafter: And should the Design of these Books take Place, it is plain, that the Prince would want the *Conscientious* Fidelity of his Subjects, and the People the *Conscientious* Justice and Kindness of each other, and so the Welfare of both would be far more precarious than it is.

THE Truth is, that to persuade them to mind their Reason only, and to banish the Apprehensions of a future Reckoning as superstitious, is to persuade them to cast off the Belief of a God, under the Notion of a Governor and Judge of Mankind, and to live as it were *without God in the World*, which is certainly one Kind of *Atheism*.

AND are the Teachers of these Lessons, which set Men loose from all the Bonds of Conscience, to be tolerated? Mr. *Locke* determines, after pleading most warmly for Indulgence in Point of Religion, that *they who deny the Being of a God; and that, Opinions contrary to human Society, and to those moral Rules which are necessary to the Preservation of civil Society, are not to be tolerated by the Magistrate*. The Case is widely different between those who dissent from the establish'd Religion as to some Particulars, and those who attempt to set aside its Authority, and to discharge the Obligation of its moral Rules; and who offer

offer nothing in its Room but a Scheme of *Atheism* in Effect; a Scheme equally *Atheistical*, as was that of *Epicurus*.

THE Clergy, Sir, have exerted themselves with becoming Zeal in Opposition to these pestilent Seducers, and they who are in Authority can incur no Imputation of Rigour, if they exert in like Manner to discountenance and restrain them. Their Notions have as ill an Aspect on the Interest of the Crown, as on the Happiness of the People; and no Man can give better Proof of a sincere Regard for his *Country*, and for *Your Royal House*, than by doing what he is able to oppose them.

FOR this Reason, I have publish'd the following Discourses, and to give them the more Credit, which may spread them the farther, I have presented them to Your ROYAL HIGHNESS. They are Yours of Right, in Virtue of the Character in which I have the Honour to serve You; and as I
well

well know, that You wish them Success in their Combat with the Spirit of Infidelity which is gone out among us, so I am equally sensible that You are far more inclin'd to deserve Praise than to receive it, and to rise still higher in Princely Qualities, than to have them recounted, by him, who is,

Your ROYAL HIGHNESS'S

Most Dutiful Servant,

and Chaplain,

John Browne.

The Obligation to believe the Divine Mission
 of JESUS CHRIST.

JOHN ix. Ver. 41.

Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no Sin; but now ye say, We see, therefore your Sin remaineth.



THESE Words were occasion'd by our Saviour's giving Sight to a poor Man who was born blind. His Neighbours who knew him to have been blind, ask'd him, how his Eyes were open'd; and being answered by him, that a Man call'd *Jesus* had restor'd him to Sight, they brought him to the *Pharisees*. The *Pharisees* acted with all the Prudence and Caution, that any Man can think reasonable, in such a Case. They would not believe the Man upon his own Word, but would know from his Parents, whether he was born blind: And being assur'd by them that he was, they

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own'd that the opening of his Eyes was a *divine Work*, and they ordered him to *give God the Praise*: But instead of concluding, which was right and reasonable to do, that *Jesus*, who had done so great a Miracle, was sent from God, they pronounc'd him to be a Sinner, and a contemptible Person, because he had cur'd the Man on the Sabbath; and they would not for that Reason, believe his *divine Mission*, tho' they were satisfy'd of his having done a *divine Work*. The blind Man himself, tho' plac'd in so low a Condition of Life, as to be a Beggar, yet argued rightly upon the Case, that, *if Jesus were not of God, he could not do a Work which never any Man did since the World began*; and he believed him to be sent from God, and became a Convert to his Religion: But the *Pharisees*, notwithstanding their better Knowledge, argued after a different Manner. They saw not Virtue in the Miracle, because the Sabbath, in their Account, was broken. They were guided by Prejudice, and not by Reason; and the Means of Conviction had no Effect upon them.

On which Account our Saviour says, *For Judgment I am come into this World, that they which see not, might see, and that they which see, might be made blind*. That is, This will be the Effect of my coming into the World, that the ignorant People shall see and own my *divine Mission*; but the Learned and Knowing shall be blind in that respect. Upon which the *Pharisees* said to him, *Are we blind also?* Are we, because we see not your Mission from God, become blind in your Account? To whom he answer'd in the Words of the Text: *If ye were blind, ye should have no Sin; but now ye say, We see; therefore your Sin remaineth*: That is, "If ye were blind thro'
" natural

“ natural Incapacity, or thro’ the Want of Means of
“ Perception, ye would have no Sin, in not seeing and
“ owning my Mission from God ; but since ye have
“ the Power and Opportunity of seeing it, your Blind-
“ ness is voluntary ; and your not owning or believ-
“ ing it, is a wilful Sin.

This, I think, is the Meaning of the Text ; and the
Doctrine arising from it is this, that “ they who are
“ capable of perceiving the divine Mission of Christ,
“ or who have Evidence sufficient to convince them of
“ it, become guilty of wilful Sin, if they do not per-
“ ceive, or believe it.

In discoursing upon which Doctrine, I shall first con-
firm it : And, secondly, apply it.

Ist. I shall confirm the Doctrine arising from the
Text ; or prove, that they who may perceive the Di-
vine Mission of Christ, are guilty of wilful Sin, if they
do not believe it.

Now this I shall prove, first, from Scripture ; and,
secondly, from the Reason of the Thing.

As to Scripture, we find in the first Place, that the
Unbelief of the *Jews* is condemn’d as Sinful. And, Se-
condly, we find, that the Belief of our Saviour’s Divine
Mission, is requir’d under the Penalty of Damnation.

Ist. The Unbelief of the *Jews* is condemn’d as
sinful.

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Our Saviour, for Instance, denounces a Woe against those Cities which were not wrought upon by his Miracles to repent and believe.

Woe unto thee Chorazin, Woe unto thee Bethsaida, for if the mighty Works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sydon, they would have repented long ago, in Sackcloth and Ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the Day of Judgment, than for you. And thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto Heaven, shall be thrust down to Hell: For if the mighty Works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this Day: But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the Land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for thee. Mat. xi. 21. Luke x. 13.

So likewise he highly condemn'd the *Pharisees*, because they did not believe upon the Evidences of his Mission he had given them, but required still further Signs in Proof of it.

An evil and adulterous Generation seeketh after a Sign, and there shall be no Sign given to it, but the Sign of the Prophet Jonas.

The Men of Nineveh shall rise up in Judgment with this Generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the Preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The Queen of the South shall rise up in the Judgment with this Generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost Parts of the Earth, to hear the Wisdom

Divine Mission of Jesus Christ. 5

dom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here.
Mat. xii. 38. Mark iii. 31. Luke viii. 19.

In like Manner he declar'd to the *Jews*, that their Doom was fix'd, their Ruin determin'd, for rejecting him. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy Children together, even as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings, and ye would not? Behold, your House is left unto you desolate; for I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord.* Mat. xxiii. 37.

He told them moreover a little before his Passion, that their Unbelief was inexcusable, and that the Word he had spoken, should attest their Guilt, and condemn them at the last Day.

I am come a Light into the World, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in Darknes.---He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my Words, hath one that judgeth him: The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last Day. John xii. 46.

If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had Sin; but now they have no Cloak for their Sin. If I had not done among them the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin; but now have they both seen, and hated both me and my Father. John xv.

Now, since the Unbelief of the *Jews* is condemn'd by our Saviour, as a Crime which had no Excuse, and for which they should be judg'd at the last Day; it is
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very plain that all Infidelity, which is of the same Kind with that of the *Jews*, must be criminal too: It is, like theirs, an inexcusable Sin, and will be charg'd as such in the Day of Judgment. They were condemn'd upon this Ground, that they had Evidence sufficient to convince them. They might, if they had pleas'd, have perceiv'd the Divine Mission of Christ. They were fully enabled to perceive it by his Miracles which they saw. They might well conclude from them, that God had sent him; and *Reason* requir'd them so to do. Therefore they who are plac'd in like Circumstances with them; who may perceive, if they will, the Divine Mission of Christ, are subject to the same Condemnation, if they imitate their Example. Their Unbelief is a wilful Sin, as arising from the Neglect, or ill Use of their rational Faculties.

Secondly, we are to consider, that the Belief of our Saviour's Mission from God, is requir'd under the Penalty of Damnation.

Thus, for Instance, when he first sent out his Apostles to preach the Gospel, and to confirm it by Miracles, he declar'd, that whoever rejected them, and their Doctrine, should be severely punished for so doing. *Whosoever, says he, shall not receive you, nor hear your Words, shake off the Dust of your Feet as a Testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for the Land of Sodom, than for that City.* Mat. x. 14. Mark vi. 11. Acts xiii. 5.

So likewise he made the same Declaration, when he sent out the seventy Disciples.

Into

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Into whatsoever City, says he, ye shall enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the Streets of the same, and say, Even the Dust of your City which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: Notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you: But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom, than for that City. Luke x. 10.

In like Manner, when he ordered the Apostles, after he was risen from the dead, to preach his Doctrine to Gentiles as well as Jews, he spake to 'em thus, *Go ye into all the World, and preach the Gospel to every Creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned. Mark xvi. 15.* That is, Go ye into the several Nations of the Earth, and proclaim to Men the glad Tidings of Salvation upon sincere Obedience which I have purchased for them, publish, among them the History of my Life, and the System of Religion I deliver'd. He who believes the Tidings which ye proclaim, and thereupon embraces my Doctrine; and becomes by Baptism a Profelyte to it; and lives, as he engages in that Rite to do, every such Person shall be saved: He shall inherit the Salvation which I purchas'd for sinful Men: But he who believeth not the Tidings which ye publish, nor regardeth the Doctrine which ye preach; and who persists in doing this, notwithstanding ye prove to him by Miracles, that God is with you, every such Person shall be damned; he shall suffer the just Punishment of his wilful Infidelity.

In these Texts, the Belief of the Christian Doctrine; that is, of its being reveal'd from God by *Jesus Christ,*
is

is requir'd of those, to whom it should be publish'd, under the Penalty of Damnation.

The same Thing is requir'd in some other Passages of Scripture.

As for instance, it is said : *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting Life ; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see Life ; but the Wrath of God abideth on him.* John iii. 36.

So likewise, *He that believeth on him is not condemned ; but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Name of the only-begotten Son of God.* Verse 18.

So again, *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your Sins.*

These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have Life thro' his Name. John viii. 24. --- xx. 31.

In these, and the like Passages, the believing our Saviour to be sent from God, is declar'd necessary to Salvation ; that is, necessary, where Men have proper Means of Conviction, or proper Grounds of Belief. This, I conceive, is the true Sense of these Texts. They do not assert, that Belief in *Christ* is the Condition of Salvation to all People ; to those, for Instance, who never heard of *Christ*, and therefore *could not possibly believe in him* ; because if that were the Case, then Multitudes of Men would be *absolutely* incapable of Salvation,
and

and so Scripture would be inconsistent with itself, which says plainly, that *Christ came into the World to save all Men*, or to give *them all* an Opportunity of Salvation; therefore the Meaning is, that the Belief of our Saviour's Divine Mission, is necessary to those, who may perceive it if they will. Belief in this Case is an indispensable Duty, and as Unbelief therefore is sinful, where it may be avoided; so I shall now proceed, secondly, to prove its *moral Iniquity*, from the Reason of the Thing.

Now this will appear from the following Considerations.

Ist. *Belief* naturally follows *Perception*; that is, What we *perceive* to be true, we naturally, or in Course *believe* to be so.

II^{dly}. *Perception* is a *free Act* of the Mind, or, we are so free in the attaining it, that we can attend, or not attend to an Object, or be more or less attentive, as we please: We are all of us conscious of this Liberty; and since the Perception of Things depends on the Application of the Mind to them, in which we are free, it is a *voluntary Action* as that is; and, as such, subject to Law, and a Matter in respect of which we are accountable to God.

III^{dly}. We are bound to perceive what by due Attention, or a right Exercise of the Understanding, we might perceive; because we ought rightly to use every Faculty we are endow'd with. This is a plain Law of Nature; and what God, the Author of our Being, and the Judge of our Actions, requires from us.

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IV^{thly}.

IVthly. Perception is *especially* necessary in Cases of Moment; in such, for instance, as concern our Virtue and Happiness; or, on which depends our right Conduct towards God, and our Well-being in a future State. In Cases of this Nature, we ought to employ the Attention which is suitable to their Importance. We ought to examine and consider Things carefully, in order to pass a right Judgment; and to act thereupon as our Duty and Happiness require.

Vthly, Therefore, the Perception of our Saviour's Divine Mission is bound upon all those, who are able to perceive it: Their Capacity infers their Obligation; and as it is their Duty to perceive it, it is their Duty also to believe it, because Belief follows Perception, and so Unbelief is a wilful Sin. It is contrary to the Reason of Things, and to the Will of God, and is equally a *moral* Iniquity, as any Vice whatsoever.

This may be prov'd by another Thread of Reasoning, in the following Manner.

Ist. Every Man is bound to serve God to the best of his Power, or to make the divine Will, as far as his Abilities reach, the Rule of his Actions. This is a moral Duty; a necessary, and unchangeable Duty, founded in the Relation which God bears to Men.

IIdly. Every Man is bound to know the divine Will, as far as he is able, because otherwise he cannot observe it, to the best of his Power. If he is ignorant of any Part of it, which he might have known, his Ignorance is *plainly wilful*, and his Inconformity to it thro' Ignorance, is the same; and as he acts contrary to God's Will

Will by his own Default, it is plain, that he cannot serve him to the best of his Power.

III^{dly}. Therefore, every Man who may know the Gospel to be the Will of God, or a Rule of Life deliver'd by his Authority, is bound so to do. He ought to enquire after, and consider, as well as he can, the Evidences of its Derivation from God, in order to inform his Mind, and to convince himself of it. If he may perceive its divine Original, his Ignorance, or Unbelief of it is wilful, and his Neglect of its Precepts, issuing therefrom, is the same ; therefore as he wilfully disobey's God's Law, it is plain, he does not serve him to the best of his Power, which is a *moral* Iniquity.

To this we may add another Consideration, which is, that, " tho' in speculative Matters, which no Way
" concern our Duty or Happiness, Men may be as ignorant as they please without Danger of Guilt ; yet,
" to be an Infidel in Religion thro' Sloth and Carelessness, for Want of examining at all, or thro' a slight
" and superficial Examination, makes Men highly
" guilty in the Sight of God ; both as it is a Neglect of
" using and applying the Faculties he has given us ; and
" as it is manifestly contrary to all the Rules of right
" Reason, not to use them in a Matter which so nearly
" concerns our Safety and Interest ; especially, when
" the Evidences of Christianity lie so open to the general
" Apprehension of Mankind, and may so easily
" be enter'd into and understood."*

* Bishop of London's 2d. Past. Lett. p. 74.

Thus

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Thus I have endeavoured to confirm the Doctrine of the Text ; that is, to prove that they who may perceive the divine Mission of *Christ*, are guilty of wilful Sin if they do not believe it.

I proceed now, secondly, to apply this Doctrine ; which I shall do by shewing, that we who live in this Christian Country, who have been baptiz'd, and brought up as Christians, and who have the free Use of the Bible, may perceive, if we please, the Divine Mission of Christ ; we cannot plead, that we want the Means of Conviction, or have not Ability to see and acknowledge it.

Now this will appear from the following Considerations.

1st. That there are several Facts related in the New Testament, concerning *Jesus Christ*, which most plainly prove, that *God was with him*.

2^{dly}. That there are several Reasons to assure us, that these Facts are true ; or, that the new Testament in which they are related, is a *faithful* and *true* History.

3^{dly}. That the present Settlement of Christianity in the World, is to us a sensible Proof of God's supporting it at the Beginning : It is a Fact which shews us, that God did then own it to be his Doctrine, by specially interposing to preserve it.

1st. then, Let us consider, that there are several Facts related in the new Testament concerning *Jesus Christ*,

Christ, which most plainly prove, that God was with him.

(1.) For instance, It is affirm'd, that he was the Person whom God all along promised in the Old Testament to send into the World. The Books of the old Testament were written by different Persons, and in different Ages; and tho' written in this Manner, they all unite in foretelling, or promising the Appearance of a certain Person, whom they particularly describe; a Person specially design'd or appointed by God to be the Saviour of the World.

Now, the Writers of the New Testament affirm, that *Jesus Christ* was this Person: They appeal to the Writers of the Old, as foretelling, and describing him; and they were guided in their Writing by the same Spirit of God, which guided *Moses* and the Prophets; as appears by their working of Miracles; therefore as they could not mistake and misapply the Writers of the Old Testament, or make a wrong Appeal to them, it is plain, that *Jesus Christ* was the Person they spake of; that is, he was specially sent from God to save Mankind. *John* i. 45. *John* vi. 67. *Mat.* xvi. 15, 16.

(2.) It is related, that God did twice declare by a Voice from Heaven, that, *Jesus was his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased*; and that in Answer to his Prayer, *Father, glorify thy Name*; there came a Voice from Heaven, saying, *I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again*. These were direct Declarations from God himself, that he had sent him into the World. *Mat.* iii. 16, 17. *Mat.* xvii. 5. *John* xii. 28.

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(3.) It

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(3.) It is related, that tho' he was bred up in a mean Way of Life, without Learning, or liberal Education, yet *he spake as never Man spake*. He taught the People in a most surprizing and wonderful Manner. He expounded the Scriptures to the Astonishment of his Hearers. He puzzled the *Jewish* Doctors upon many Occasions. He was infinitely too hard for the most learned among them. He answer'd their ensnaring Questions in such a Manner, as quite baffled their Designs; and he propos'd such Questions to them, as they could make no Reply to. *Whence then, as they themselves ask'd, could he have such Wisdom? or, how could he know Letters, having never learned?* Why, it is evident, that his Wisdom and Knowledge were deriv'd *immediately* from God, since they could not have been attain'd in a *natural* Way, and that therefore they were illustrious Proofs of his Divine Mission. *John* vii. 46. *Mat.* vii. 28, 29. *Luke* iv. 22, 32. *Mat.* xiii. 54, 55, 56. *John* vii. 15.

(4.) It is related, that he foretold several Events which could not be foreseen by *human Wisdom*. He foretold, for Instance, that he should die by Crucifixion; that, he should rise from the Dead within three Days after it; that his Apostles should preach his Doctrine in all the World; that they should confirm it by miraculous Works; that it should prevail in Spite of all Opposition; and that the *Jewish* Temple and Government should be destroy'd; all which Events could not be foreseen by *human Knowledge*, because they were vastly unlikely; and, humanly speaking, impossible; and yet they actually came to pass, as he foretold they should.

should. *Mat.* xx. 18, 19. *Mat.* xvii. 22, 23. *Act* s
i. 8. *Mark* xvi. 17, 18. *Mat.* xvi. 18.

(5.) It is related, that he perform'd all Sorts of Miracles. He gave Sight to the Blind, Feet to the Lame, Speech to the Dumb, and Life to the Dead, only with a Word speaking, which are Works that exceed all human Power, and which no Creature can do, unless God permits, or commissions him to do them ; which is the same in Effect, as his doing them himself. *Mat.* xv. 30. *Luke* vii. 14, 15. *John* xi. 43, 44.

(6) It is related, that he appeal'd to his Resurrection as the Test of his coming from God ; and that, after he had stak'd all his Credit, and all the Truth of his Pretensions on this Event, it came to pass ; which being plainly impossible but by Virtue of God's Power, it is evident, that, if God had not sent him into the World, he would not have assisted him to deceive it, in effecting the Event on which he had put the Truth of his Mission. *John* xi. 18, 19, 21. *Mat.* xxvii. 63, 64.

Lastly, It is related, that he ascended into Heaven in the Presence of his Apostles, and that in ten Days after his Ascension, they were endued with Power, in pursuance of his Promise, by which they were enabled to preach his Doctrine to the World. They were endued with a perfect Remembrance of every thing he had done, and every thing he had taught ; they were endued with the Gift of Tongues, or an Ability of speaking all Languages, by which they might discourse with the People of all Nations : And they were endued with Wisdom and Firmness of Mind, that enabled them to appear with Advantage before the greatest and wisest Men ;

Men ; to meet all the Discouragements, and endure all the Hardships that should be laid upon them ; and, at length to seal their Testimony with their Blood. *Acts* i. 9, 10, 11. *Acts* i. 5, 8, compared with *Acts* xi. to Verse 12. *John* xiv. 26. *Acts* iv. from Verse 5, to 32. *Acts* v. 41. *Acts* vii. 59, 60.

These are the Facts related in the new Testament concerning *Jesus Christ* ; which Facts, if true, are plain Proofs, that he was a Man approved of God, or a Teacher sent from him ; and that the Doctrine he taught was not merely his, but God's who sent him.

Let us then proceed, secondly, to consider, what Reasons there are to conclude, that these Facts are true, or that the New Testament, in which they are related, is a faithful and true History.

Now, in Proof of this, we may consider as follows.

Ist. The History of the New Testament is *genuine* ; that is, it was written by those Persons to whom it is now ascrib'd, because it has been own'd as their Work in every Age quite down from their own Times ; that is, each Gospel of the new Testament has been cited in every Age as the Work of that Author, whose Name it now bears. *

* *Grotius* observes, that they are cited by *Justin*, *Irenæus*, *Clemens*, and then afterwards by others, under the Names they now bear. *de Verit. Rel. Chr. Lib. 3. Cap. 2.*

The same Thing is prov'd more at large by *Huetius*, *Demon. Evang.* p. 29. 8vo. The Genuineness of these Books is also very well proved by the Bishop of London, in his third pastoral Letter.

II^{dly}, The

IIIdly. The Writers of this History *could not be mistaken.* They had themselves *personal Knowledge*, or *certain Information* of what they relate: *St. Matthew* and *St. John* were Eye, or Ear-Witnesses of the Facts they record: *St. Mark* had his Accounts from *St. Peter*, who was an Eye-Witness from the Beginning; and *St. Luke* from *St. Paul*, to whom the whole Gospel was reveal'd immediately from Heaven. *

IIIIdly. The Writers of this History were no less *faithful* than *knowing*. They did not invent a Story to deceive the World; but related real Fact, and nothing else.

This we are assur'd of by the following Reasons.

1. Because they had no manner of Temptation to impose upon the World by an invented Story, or to engage in so wicked an Enterprize: And it is perfectly unnatural, for Men to do what they know to be wicked, without any Motive to induce them to it.

2. Because they endur'd all Sorts of Misery, and submitted unanimously to the most cruel Deaths for the sake of their Report. Tho' Wit and Malice conspir'd together, to find out Executions of the greatest Torture, yet they bore all with unshaken Resolution. They

* *Gal. i. 11, 12.* *St. Mark's* Gospel was written by the Direction of *St. Peter*, and *St. Luke's* by that of *St. Paul*. *Euseb. E. H. lib. ii. c. 15.* *Iren. lib. iii. c. 1.* *Tertull. cont. Marci. lib. iv. c. 5.* *St. John* also review'd the Gospels of *St. Mark*, and *St. Luke*, and confirm'd the Truth of them. *Euf. E. H. lib. iii. c. 24.*

first expos'd themselves to Death by their Attestation, and then persisted in it, not to avoid Death, but to meet it. And could they have done this, if their Story had been invented? It is certainly unnatural, that they should; and therefore may well pass for impossible.

3. Because their low Condition in Life render'd them the least apt to design, and the least qualify'd to attempt so vast a Project, as the introducing of a new Religion into the World by the Dint of Forgery and Fraud.

4. Because their History is confirm'd by the Testimony both of Jewish and Heathen Writers. These Authors agree with the New Testament in several Particulars: They attest the Facts that plainly prove the divine Mission of *Christ*: Such as his foretelling of future Events, his working all Sorts of Miracles, and his rising from the Dead: And as they were Enemies to the *Christian* Religion, and cannot be suppos'd to copy after, or to favour the Evangelists, their Concurrence with them is a great Confirmation of the Truth of their History.*

Lastly, Because they wrought Miracles in Support of their Veracity. They did not barely relate the Works of *Christ*; but prov'd the Truth of their Relation, by doing the like Works themselves; as appears plainly from their spreading the Gospel in several Nations;

* His foretelling of future Events is affirm'd by *Phlegon Trallianus*. *Huet. Demon. Evan.* p. 42.

His working of Miracles is own'd by the *Jews* in their *Talmud*, lib. iv. c. 6. It is own'd also by *Celsus* and *Julian*. *Gro. lib.* ii. c. 5.

which

which they could not have done without the Power of Miracles.

Now, since they were Writers both *knowing* and *faithful*, it is plain, that their History has all the Evidences of Truth, which any History can have: And we may observe farther, that it is more credible than any other History, upon this account; namely, that the Authors of it submitted to all Sorts of Persecution, and at length to Death itself, in Attestation of its Truth. Therefore we are certain of the Facts related in it, and consequently of the Divine Mission of *Christ*, which those Facts demonstrate.

In farther Confirmation of which, we are to consider, *3dly*, That the present Settlement of Christianity in the World is to us a sensible Proof, that God supported it at the Beginning. It is a Fact which shews us, that God did then own it to be his Doctrine, by specially interposing to preserve it.

Gamaliel argu'd rightly, that, *-if it were not of God, it would come to nothing.* *Acts* v. 38. For it must, in the Nature of Things, have quickly perish'd, if God had not supported it: Because it had no natural Power to make its Way in the World, or to withstand the violent Opposition, wherewith it was encounter'd.

It was preach'd at the Beginning to *Jews* and *Gentiles*, who were prejudic'd against it by their Education: and there was nothing in the *Nature of the Doctrine*, or in the *Condition of its Publishers*, or in the *Manner of its Proposat*,

Proposal, to overcome their Prejudices, and induce them to embrace it.

As to the *Nature of the Doctrine*, it was by its Strictness very disagreeable, and more likely by far to set Men against it, than to allure them to it. It did not allow them any vicious Pleasures, or the Indulgences to which they had been us'd; but forbad them under the highest Penalty: It promis'd no temporal Advantages to invite them; but foretold Dangers and Afflictions, that tended rather to affright them from it.

As to the *Condition of its Publishers*, they were Men of no Figure or Fortune in the World, not capable by their Influence to spread it. They were Fishermen only, People of low Circumstances in Life, and having neither Learning nor Skill, whereby to draw away Disciples after them.

As to the *Manner of its Proposal*, it was not recommended with the Ornaments of Eloquence, or the Arts of Subtlety, to delude Men, nor back'd with Power, to force them to embrace it. The Preachers of it had no Legions at their Command, carrying the Gospel on the Point of their Swords, which was the Case of *Ma-homet's* Doctrine; but all the Power of the World, as well civil as military, was against them.

How then can we account for the spreading of their Religion, or their prevailing on Men to embrace it? Why, it is plain, that they convinc'd them of its Truth by doing Miracles before them; and by that means converted them. If they had not done this, every
Profelyte

Profelyte would have been a Prodigy, an Exception to human Nature; for he must have chang'd his Religion, not only without any natural Inducement, but against the strongest Motives to the contrary; that is, he must have acted against Nature, and have done what no Man ever did, since the World began.

We are to consider farther, that the *Christian* Religion was oppos'd at the first with the utmost Violence. The Rulers of the World, both *Jewish* and *Pagan*, did all they could to crush and suppress it: They threaten'd, and imprison'd, and murder'd both those who preach'd it, and those who profess'd it. This appears from the New Testament, and likewise from the Writings of some Heathen Authors, as well as Christian, who attest the Edicts that were made, and the Cruelties that were us'd to destroy Christianity.

And yet it withstood all Opposition; and the more it was persecuted, the more it prosper'd. But how was this possible? Why, it could not have come to pass without God's special Providence. He exerted his Power in various Miracles, to convert Men to the Gospel; and then gave them Courage and Constancy to suffer for it: By which means, the Efforts that were us'd to stifle it, did only spread it the more.

Many were the Nations, and innumerable the People, who receiv'd it in the Days of the Apostles, notwithstanding the bloody Persecutions, that rag'd under *Nero* and *Domitian*: And tho', a few Years afterwards, in *Trajan's* Reign, there were so many Christians murder'd, that *Pliny* the *Proconsul* was frighten'd at their
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Number, and advis'd the Emperor to relax his Edicts ; yet Christianity still gain'd Ground : And we may observe farther, that tho' some of the Emperors set themselves, in a particular manner, to root it out, and us'd all the Policy, and all the Force they were Masters of, for that Purpose, yet they could not effect it ; but *were found to fight even against God*, in striving to suppress it ; for God plainly appear'd on its Side ; and when he had bore it up thro' ten Persecutions, and manifested to the World, that nothing could overthrow it, then he thought fit, and not before, to raise up a Prince, to wit, *Constantine the Great*, to protect and favour it. Therefore, since its present Settlement in the World is plainly owing to God's signal Protection of it at the Beginning, it is a sensible Proof, that he then own'd it to be his Doctrine, by interposing to preserve it.

Hence it appears, that we do not want Evidence to convince us of *Christ's Mission* from God. It is plain, that we may perceive it, if we do but read the New Testament, and consider Things with tolerable Care. Therefore, if we do not perceive it, our Blindness is a wilful Sin, it is owing to our own Default ; and so far as it is voluntary, it is sinful : It has a moral Iniquity in it, as being contrary to *Reason* and *Truth* ; and we are equally accountable for it, as for any Act of Wickedness whatever. *If ye were blind, ye should have no Sin : but now ye say, We see : Therefore your Sin remaineth.*

SER.

S E R M O N II.

*The Obligation to believe the Divine Mission
of JESUS CHRIST.*

JOHN ix. Ver. 41.

*Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye
should have no Sin; but now ye say, We
see, therefore your Sin remaineth.*



THESE are the Words of our Saviour to the
Pharisees; the Meaning of which is this:
“ If ye were blind thro’ natural Incapacity,
“ or thro’ the Want of Means of Percep-
“ tion, ye would have no Sin, in not see-
“ ing and owning my Mission from God: But since
“ ye have the Power and Opportunity of seeing it, your
“ Blindness is voluntary, and your not owning or be-
“ lieving it, is a wilful Sin.”

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This being the Meaning of the Text, the Doctrine arising from it is this: That “They who are capable
“ of perceiving the divine Mission of *Christ*, or who
“ have Evidence sufficient to convince them of it, be-
“ come guilty of wilful Sin, if they do not perceive or
“ believe it.”

The Truth of this Doctrine I prov'd from Scripture and from Reason: And as to the Application of it, which was the other Thing propos'd, I shew'd, that we who live in this Christian Country, who have been baptiz'd, and brought up as Christians, and who have the free Use of the Bible, may easily perceive the Divine Mission of *Christ*. We may, if we will but read the New Testament, and consider Things with common Care, be assur'd of several Facts, which most plainly prove it. Therefore, as we may believe it, if we please, the Unbelief of it is a wilful Sin. Our Case is like that of the *Pharisees*; and what our Saviour said to them, may be apply'd to us: *If ye were blind, ye should have no Sin: But since ye have it in your Power to see, therefore your Sin remaineth.*

And this is what I shall now endeavour more fully to open and confirm, in order to guard you against Unbelief, which is become very common, and, in a manner, fashionable in the Nation.

It is very certain, that the Proofs of *Christ's* Mission from God to reveal his Will, are plain enough to be well perceiv'd, and strong enough, in all Reason, to persuade the Assent: We can hardly conceive, that any Man of common Sense, who employs the Attention

tion in his Power, should want the Means of Conviction. For if he will but consider the Facts related in the Gospel, and the Reasons that confirm their Truth; or if he will but reflect upon the Settlement of Christianity in the World, which could not possibly have happen'd, if God had not supported it at first, and thereby own'd it to be his Doctrine; if, I say, he will, but do this; (and who is there almost of so mean a Capacity, as not to be able to do it?) he may plainly see, that *Jesus* was a Teacher sent from God, or that the Doctrine he taught, was not merely his, but God's who sent him.

If this be the Case, then what Reason can be assigned for Unbelief? Or, into what Cause can it be resolved? Why, either into *Neglect*, or *Prejudice*, or *Perverseness*. As there is Evidence sufficient to convince him, and yet he is not convinced; the Reason of this must be, either, first, because he is *negligent*; or, secondly, because he is *prejudic'd*; or, thirdly, because he has a *perverse Turn of Mind*.

1st. His Unbelief may be owing to *Negligence*.

He does not turn his Thoughts to this Matter, or endeavour to inform his Mind, and convince his Judgment. He is careless in religious Concerns, and regards but little either the *Precepts*, or the *Original* of the Gospel. He has some confus'd Notion of both, in which he acquiesces, and gives himself no farther Trouble; and is not such Negligence wilful? Surely, any Man, in what Station of Life soever he be, may sometimes read the new Testament, or hear it read to him; or

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may know that Christianity is the Religion of several Countries, and may hence perceive, that it is from God; and if this may be done by the inferior sort of People, much more may those do it, who are plac'd in higher Stations. They have more Leisure for Employment of this Kind, and are better able to attend to it, as being less encumbred, generally speaking, with the Cares and Difficulties of Life. They may examine, and weigh Things seriously, and gain a clear Perception, that their Religion is divine. They very often indeed, neglect the Bible, and throw it aside as a useless Book; so likewise, they neglect the Thoughts of Religion, and entertain no Sentiment that is serious, rational and manly. But this is their own Choice, they are not compell'd to do it, and they cannot plead Necessity, that their Minds are taken up with the Vanities and Follies of the World, and that they fly from Religion, as from a mortal Foe. Therefore their Unbelief, or Want of Conviction, is plainly *wilful*: It arises from a wretched Preference of this World to the next, of Bawbles, and Trifles, to Concerns of highest Moment; and as it is wilful, they are accountable for it; and methinks it is strange to consider, that Men of good Sense and Understanding in other Respects, are often very ignorant as to Religion. They have little or no Notion of the Grounds it stands upon, and can scarce give any other Reason of the Faith they profess, but that they were bred up in it by their Parents.

But secondly, The Unbelief of the Gospel, notwithstanding the Evidences of its Truth, may be owing to *Prejudice*.

Prejudice

Prejudice is properly an *over-hasty Judgment*, a Judgment or Determination of the Mind, before a Cause is fully heard, or well examin'd and consider'd; and in this Sense the Unbelief of the Gospel is often owing to *Prejudice*; a Man takes up a Persuasion without weighing Things carefully, that the Gospel is not the Doctrine of God, but a mere human Invention; and having this Byass or Prepossession against its divine Original, he does not care to perceive it. He is negligent or partial in his Enquiries about it, and so keeps out the Light which might convince him of it, and remove the Opinion he has embrac'd.

Nothing is more common than to judge over hastily, or to take up Persuasions without due Examination, and be influenc'd both in assenting and dissenting, more by Inclination than by Reason.

What a Man likes, or wishes to be true, he easily believes; his Inclination is a Byass upon the Mind, and precipitates his Judgment; he dwells upon the Things that make for it, but slights those that oppose it; he does not carefully attend to them, or impartially consider them; but jumps into his Conclusion, either without *Reason*, or *against* it.

On the other Hand, what a Man dislikes, or wishes to be false, he easily disbelieves; his Dislike of it soon determines him against it; he overlooks, or darkens the Evidences that favour it, and keeps his Eye fix'd on the Objections to it; and as he is partial in examining, he is the same in judging, and he concludes without Premises or against them.

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This being a common Case, we may well infer, that he, who disbelieves the Gospel, the Evidences of whose Truth, are so clear and full, has judg'd *rashly* against it; he is influenc'd by some *Motive* to judge in that Manner; by a *Motive*, perhaps, of *Example*, or *Vanity*, or *Interest*, or *Resentment*. This induces him to flight or perplex the Evidences of its Truth, and so he rests in his precipitate Judgment, that it is a human Device.

Ist. For Instance, a Man may be excited to judge in this Manner by the Power of *Example*.

He may have observ'd, that many Persons of high Dignity and Station, express no Regard for Christianity, but neglect and despise it as an Imposture; and so likewise, that some Persons of shining Characters in the learned World, have done the same; these Examples strike him so powerfully, that he *implicitly* follows them, he don't examine whether they are good, or fit to be imitated; but concludes, that they are so without Enquiry; he thinks it genteel, or creditable to copy after such Patterns as these, and so treads in their Steps, not considering, either what he is doing, or whither he is going. But certainly, if ever *the Blind led the Blind*, it is so in this Case, where *Atheists and Deists* are *blindly follow'd*; and if the Consequence is natural, that they should *both fall into the Ditch*, it cannot in this Case be avoided, where the *Follower*, being *wilfully blind*, as well as the *Leaders*, has *no Excuse* for his Unbelief; he may, it is likely, conceive highly of himself, while he is chusing of Darkness rather than Light; and he may scoff perhaps, with much *Pertness*, at all *Guides* in Religion, and at all People who mind them,
while

Divine Mission of Jesus Christ. 29

while he is meanly doing the same Thing ; only with this Difference, that he makes as ill a Choice of a *Guide*, as can be imagin'd ; for certainly, *Atheists* and *Infidels* are, of all Men, the *worst Guides in Religion*.

But secondly, a Man may be prejudic'd against the Gospel by the Power of *Vanity*.

A great Conceit of his Understanding, and a great Desire of displaying it, may prompt him to disapprove what is generally receiv'd, and to strike into a Path not so much beaten. If he were to join in the common Persuasion, he would be lost, as it were, in a Crowd ; he would pass undistinguish'd in the Herd of Men, and could make no extraordinary Figure, or engage the Attention of the World ; therefore to shew himself as a Man of singular Abilities, and to attract the publick Eye ; he disdains what others esteem, and opposes what they believe. We have known Men of fair Characters in Life, virtuous in many Respects, who yet have disbeliev'd the Gospel, and taken a World of Pains to spread their Infidelity ; and what can be the Reason of this, but that they dislike the Belief of it as a common and vulgar Thing, and are ambitious of appearing in a distinguishing Light, and of becoming, perhaps, the Heads of a Party. This seems to be very evident, from the Publication of their Sentiments ; for what but *Vanity* could excite them to this ? Why should they not be satisfy'd with their Unbelief in private ? Why should they be solicitous to gain Profelytes ? It is plainly against their Interest to act in this Manner ; they stir up the Advocates of Religion to confront and expose them ; and while other Men are Believers, they

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they may have the Pleasures of Life more to themselves; they may take their Range in the World with less Interruption, and have the fewer Rivals to disturb them; therefore it is their Thirst of Admiration that pushes them on. They cannot be easy without the Satisfaction and Support of Applause. They would triumph, if possible, in a Retinue of Converts; they would be the Idols of the admiring World; and, for this Purpose, they publish their Sentiments.

III^{dly}. A Man may be prejudic'd against the Gospel by a Motive of *Interest*; for if he leads a wicked Life, and resolves to continue in it, the Gospel threatens him with Eternal Ruin, and so it becomes his Interest that it should be false, because if it be true, he is undone for ever; therefore he is extremely averse to it. The Belief of it would be very troublesome and uneasy to him. It would not suffer him to go on in the Ways of his Heart, without much of Pain and Terror. It would reduce him to this Distress, either to part with his Vices, or with the Peace of his Mind, therefore he avoids it as an Enemy to him. He is as irreconcilable to the Gospel, as that is to his Sins. He cannot bear the Thoughts of its Divine Authority; he turns away his Eyes from the Evidences of it, or else tries to disparage them. The least Cavil or Objection against it appears very considerable; and thus he settles in Unbelief. This is a secure Retreat, where he can enjoy his Vices unmolested.

But IV^{thly}. A Man may be prejudic'd against the Gospel by a Motive of *Resentment*.

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The Sound of *Priestcraft*, perhaps, has been ringing in his Ears for some Time ; and as the World is govern'd more by Sounds than by Sense, it has wrought him into a violent Ferment against the Gospel. The Gospel he thinks is nothing else but Priestcraft, and *the Priests are a Pack of Knaves that ought to be driven off from the Earth, for it is not fit that they should live.* Heated with this Fancy, he does not examine the Cause, or consider the Proofs of the Gospel, or regard what may be pleaded in its Behalf, but only exclaims against it with Rage, even as the Jews, when inflam'd against its Author, would hearken to nothing that *Pilate* said in his Favour ; but cry'd out the more fiercely, *Away with him, Away with him, crucify him.* This is but natural, when People are enrag'd, whether against the Gospel, or for it. Do but consider the *Ephesians*, when *St. Paul* attempted to convert them to it. They enquir'd not into the Reason, or Truth of what he said ; but their Interest being struck at, they were immediately in an Uproar, and furiously cry'd out, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians* : Nay, they were so very outrageous, that they repeated this Exclamation for two Hours together. Do ye think that all the Bigotry or Superstition in the World, is on the Side of the Gospel ? Here it was with a Witness on the other Side ; and it is equally so when a Man is heated against the Gospel under the Notion of *Priestcraft*, and then raves out, *Priestcraft, Priestcraft*, as long as the *Ephesians* did *Great is Diana*. This, I say, is excessive Bigotry or Superstition ; for the Man has no Proof of what he says, but the Fancy of it throws him into a Storm.

These are the Motives by which a Man may be prejudic'd against the Christian Religion ; and so far as
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his *Prejudice* is wilful, or owing to any Fault or Neglect on his Part, so far it is sinful. It is a wrong Judgment of Mind in Case of high Moment, which he might have prevented ; therefore he is accountable to God for it, and for all the Inattention and Partiality proceeding from it, by Virtue of which it keeps its Ground.

But, III^{dly}. As Infidelity may be owing to *Carelessness*, or to *Prejudice*; so likewise to a *perverse Turn of Mind*.

A Man may require more Evidence, than is in *all Reason sufficient*. He may insist upon *strict Demonstration* of the Gospel. He may require Miracles to be done before his Eyes; or, a Man to rise from the Dead; and he may say, I will trust no Histories, or Reports whatever; but *except I see, I will not believe*. Now, is not this Temper of Mind strangely untoward? It makes a Man an Unbeliever in Spite of all Reason and all Sense; for he has as clear and full Evidence of the Facts which prove the Gospel, of the Miracles, for Instance, and the Resurrection of *Christ*, as he has of any ancient Facts whatever, of the Conquests, suppose, of *Alexander the Great*; or the Wars of *Julius Caesar*, and the like. Nay, he has *more Evidence* of the former, than the latter; in that, the Witnesses of them sealed their Testimony with their Blood; in that, the Enemies of the Gospel have freely owned them: and in that, God himself bore Witness to the Faithfulness of the Relaters, by enabling them to spread their Doctrine in the World; therefore these Facts are, at least, *as indisputably certain*, as any other; and if so, how perverse is it to demand
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more Evidence, as the Ground of Belief? And how inexcusable is Infidelity, plac'd on such a Foot?

Suppose it were a Religious Concern, or an Affair of like Moment with the Belief of the Gospel, to believe the Conquests of *Alexander the Great*; What would ye think of that Man who should refuse to believe them, unless he had Demonstration of their Truth; or unless *Alexander* should rise from the Dead, and attest them to him. I say, what would ye think of such a Man as this? Would ye not take him to be void of Sense? Or, a strange untoward Creature, acting contrary to all Reason? And is not the Case the same, as to the Facts which confirm the Gospel? Does not he who calls for more Proof of them, act the same wild and unaccountable Part? Most certainly he does. It is very plain, either that he wants common Reason, or else resolves not to use it, which in Effect is much the same: In like Manner, as he who won't see, is as blind, in Effect, as he who can't see. And yet, Unbelief, with Respect to the Gospel, of which a Man would be asham'd in a parallel Case, and for which he would be deem'd an *Ideot* or a *Madman*, is openly avow'd as a reasonable Thing; Nay as a Mark of uncommon Penetration. A Man, for Instance, would be asham'd to deny, that there was such a Prince as *Julius Caesar*, or *William the Conqueror*, or *Henry VIII.* and would be asham'd to deny the Facts that all History reports them to have done; and yet he will deny with Confidence the Works of *Jesus Christ*, which are better attested than the other; and he will assume an Air of singular Caution and Sagacity, as if he saw farther than other Men, or were more wise and judicious. So likewise, if a Man were to deny

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ny all ancient Facts, however attested, and to say, *he would not believe any thing but what he sees with his own Eyes*, he would universally be look'd upon as a Fool, or a Lunatick; and yet when he treats with Scorn the Facts of the Gospel, which are as certain to the full, as any Actions of *Julius Caesar*, or *William the Conqueror*, or *Henry VIII.* he draws but little Censure on his Understanding. He may be thought perhaps something of an odd Man; but his Sense, or Soundness of Mind is not call'd in Question, whereas in reality he is an *Ideot*. or a *Madman*; I mean he is so in that Instance, he judges as contrary to all Sense and Reason, as if he were perfectly void of either. And this is what often happens in other Instances; for we may observe, that tho' but few in Comparison are absolutely Fools, or absolutely mad, yet Multitudes are so in some Respects. They think, and act as much out of the Way in several Cases, as if they were beside themselves, or had no Sense at all. They have such a Stupidity, or Disorder on their Understanding, that there is nothing so monstrous for its Absurdity, but what they will embrace, nor any thing so extravagant for its Folly, but what they will do. Let the Belief of *Transubstantiation* be one Instance of Appeal, and let the Practice of *Idolatry* be another. For can any thing be more stupid, than to believe against ones Senses? To believe that to be *Christ's Body*, which is seen, and felt, and tasted to be Bread? Or to believe a *Piece* of Bread to be his *whole Body*? Or to believe that it is in Fifty thousand Places at once? And yet this is done by Multitudes of Men of good Sense and Understanding in other respects. In like manner, what can be more stupid, than to fall down in religious Worship before
Stocks.

Stocks and Stones? Or, as *Isaiah* tells us, to burn Part of a Piece of Timber in the Fire, and to make the Residue of it a God? to worship it, and pray unto it, saying, Deliver me, for thou art my God? Ch. xliv. As if one Part of the Wood were more sacred than the other, or could, by the Art of the Workman, be turn'd into a Deity.

And yet, senseless as this is, it has been done by the Majority of Men from the Beginning of the World to this Day. And what do ye think is the Cause of such Idiotism or Frenzy? Why, That the Prejudices, and Passions, and Interests of Men, do strangely cloud, or disturb their Reason, and turn the Light that is in them into Darknes. And this is the Case with Infidels: Their Attachment to some beloved Pursuits blinds their Understanding, and leads them into as flagrant a Contradiction to good Sense, as is *Popish Faith*, or *Pagan Idolatry*: For their Unbelief is plainly so, being the Refusal of Assent to Things unquestionably certain; which is equally irrational, as the giving of Assent to Things palpably false. For tho' some Men seem to fancy, that this is impossible, or that Backwardness of Belief can never be wrong, yet it is certain, that *Incredulity* is as absurd a Thing as *Credulity*. The true Point of Wisdom, or good Sense, is to give or with-hold the Assent, according to the Evidence of Things. Therefore he who disbelieves what is highly credible, acts as unwise a Part, as he who believes what is incredible. Suppose, for the Purpose, a Man should deny, that there was such a Prince as *William the Conqueror*; would he not be as silly to the full, as he who should believe, that he was 12 Feet high? Therefore, whatever the Infidels may imagine, their Conduct is not Wisdom or Judgment,

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ment, but Madness or Folly. It is liable to this Censure, as being *grossly unreasonable*, and as exposing them to the just Punishment of God.

Thus it appears, that the Case of Unbelievers in this *Christian Country*, is like that of the *Pharisees* among the *Jews*: Their *Blindness* is voluntary, and therefore *their Sin remaineth*.

I shall now draw two Inferences from the whole, and therewith conclude.

1st. If we are bound to believe the divine Mission of *Christ*, as having Evidence sufficient to convince us of it, we are bound likewise to consider his Precepts as the Laws of God, and to conform ourselves to them, as far as we are able. The divine Authority of his Precepts plainly follows from his divine Mission: Therefore the same Proof of the one, which binds us to acknowledge it, doth bind us also to acknowledge the other; that is, to believe the *divine Authority* of his Precepts, and therefore to obey them. We ought to use our best Care, first to know the Lessons he taught, and then, to observe them. We are to act in all Points, as they direct, or to make them the Rule of our Lives; not presuming to set up mere Reason as our Guide, or to take our Measures of acting from that alone. This indeed is a common Practice at present: Many are the People, who pay little or no Regard to the Precepts of the Gospel: They do *what is right in their own Eyes*, or what they judge proper or convenient, and nothing more: They regard perhaps two or three Duties of a *moral Kind*, such as *Justice*, *Benevolence*, and the like;
but

but they mind not other Duties, such as *Hallowing the Sabbath, Worshipping of God in Publick, and Reverencing his Name*, tho' equally moral, as being agreeable to the *eternal Nature of Things*, and tho' most plainly and positively commanded in Scripture. They are a Sort of *Law to themselves*, as they *make the Law* they are pleas'd to observe. God is no Lawgiver to them: They take the legislative Power out of his Hands, and place it in their own. And what can they say for acting in this manner? Can they plead, as the *Pagans* might, that they have no other Light, but their own Reason, to direct them; or that they don't perceive the Rules of the Gospel to be the Precepts of God? But it is certain, that they might, by due Care, or by the impartial Use of their Reason, perceive them to be *divine*: Therefore they are bound so to do; and bound, in Consequence, to observe them. This is the true State of the Case; and whatever fond Conceits they may indulge of themselves, as acting a wise and sagacious Part, their Conduct is the Extremity of Folly, unless they were *sure*, that they shall die as the Beasts do, or that there is no future State, or Judgment to come.

2dly, The other Inference I would make is this, that, if Unbelief proceeds from Prejudices or Passions, which give a wrong Turn to the Mind, we ought most carefully to avoid all such Courses of Life, as may raise in us such Prejudices or Passions.

When Men lean to one Side of a Question more than the other, it is natural for them to overlook, or neglect the Merits of the Cause, and to conclude rashly on that
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Side to which they lean. This, ye have heard, is the Case of Unbelievers: They have a Byas upon the Mind, which renders them partial in examining, and precipitate in judging: And the same will be our Case, if we follow any immoral, or vicious Practices; for then the Gospel will be disagreeable to us, as condemning our Actions; and we, in Course, shall be inclin'd against it, and thereby strongly tempted to disbelieve it.

Suppose, for Instance, that we live in the Practice of Injustice, or Intemperance, or Malice, which the Gospel forbids under the highest Penalty; it is plain, we cannot be easy in these Views, if we believe the Gospel: Therefore, in order to be easy in them, we shall naturally endeavour to evade the Belief of it: we shall neglect the Evidences of its Truth; or indulge Scruples and Objections against it; and so keep out a settled Persuasion of its Truth, if not *positively disbelieve* it. Whereas, if we lead a virtuous Life, agreeable to the Rules of the Gospel; or pursue our present Interests and Pleasures no farther than it allows us; we shall have no Prejudices against it, or Reluctance to believe it; no Interest to serve by rejecting it; and therefore no Byas on the Mind, which may carry us so to do: We shall be fitly dispos'd to admit the Light which may convince us; to examine and perceive the Proofs of its Authority, and by that means to believe it. Our Saviour says, *If any Man will do the Will of God, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself: Joh. vii. 17.* That is, Whoever will conform his Life to the Precepts of Christianity, will soon see, and acknowledge its Divine Original. Therefore let us ever be careful to
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lead a Christian Life. This will be an excellent Preservative against loose Principles, or ungodly Notions. It will guard us against the Attempts of profligate Seducers, who are trying every Way to corrupt the Nation. It will take away all Temptation to become Infidels, and to settle in Unbelief, out of Love to our Vices; which is so mean, and base, and wicked a Motive, so apostate from Good, and abandon'd to Evil, that it cannot but deserve the severest Punishment. In short, a Christian Life will strengthen us in the Belief of the Gospel, and that again will confirm us in a Christian Life. Our Faith and our Virtue will mutually support and heighten each other; and then, at all Adventures, we must be safe. We can run no Risque or Hazard whatever: For, supposing that the Gospel should, in the Event, prove an Imposture, as the Infidels pretend, yet we can suffer nothing by it; we have acted as became rational Creatures, and have liv'd in such a manner, as a just and holy God cannot but approve. But if the Gospel be true, as there is all the Reason in the World to think it is, what will then become of the Infidel? He hath resisted all the Evidences of its Truth, and wilfully shut his Eyes against it, purely for the sake of such Practices, as the Light of Nature, or common Reason condemns. And what can be his Fate, but eternal Ruin? He hath nothing to plead in his Excuse, nothing to offer, that may alleviate his Guilt; and so he must be irrecoverably undone, and bear his Iniquity for ever and ever.

Whoso therefore is wise, let him act with Security. Let him not, to humour his Appetites, and to live like
a Brute,

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a Brute, set at nought the Christian Faith, the Consequence of which must be fatal : But let him heartily believe it, and sincerely live up to it ; and he will inherit the greatest Blessings of which he is capable ; all the Comforts he wants in this *Vale of Misery*, and all the Happiness he can enjoy, when he is remov'd out of it.

F I N I S.



